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PAC SPEAKER EXAMINES PRESS OFFICES

Stephen Hess, author of "The Government/Press Connection," told USDA public affairs officers May 14 that he found little correlation between being a good press officer and having worked in the media.

In his study of the press offices of four Federal agencies and the White House, Hess said, there were good press officers with a background of press experience and good press officers who had no such background.

Addressing the Public Affairs Council of USDA, Hess said he found that reporters generally felt superior to press officers and often thought of them as "probably failed reporters."

The credibility of press officers with the press was better at the Department of Defense than at the Department of State, Hess said, because the press officers at DOD were at a higher level (usually colonels) and well trained.

Hess found another difference between those agencies. He said that at State, during a crisis, all press contact had to be through one press officer. His telephone was always busy, so the press, "abhorring a vacuum" went to other sources for a story.

At Defense, on the other hand, he said, there was a group of position papers covering the main issues of the day and any information person could read from them.

Hess said he found that relations between the career information officer and his politically-appointed boss smoothed out after six months or a year, but that there was "tremendous suspicion" of career press office people by their fellow careerists in the agency, the program people.

A lot of time was spent by information officers just trying to get information out of their own agencies, he said.

Hess indicated it was advantageous to have the agency's press officer in the decision-making loop, yet that was true in only one of the five offices he studied, the Department of Transportation. There, Hess said, this inclusion helped create a success of the Administration's actions with the air traffic controllers.

ANIMAL HEALTH INFO GOING ELECTRONIC

Plans are underway by a number of USDA agencies and the Food and Drug Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services to set up an electronic database of current information about animal health, veterinary services, and veterinary biologics.

The database would include research results, regulatory actions, and other information of interest to those in the business of informing and educating the owners of livestock, poultry and pets, as well as veterinarians and researchers.

The information would be presented as a menu item within the "USDA Online" service provided through the computer time-share services of ITT Dialcom Inc. A tentative date to begin this service would be late summer or early fall.

The electronic service could be particularly valuable during an animal disease outbreak, or other animal health or veterinary emergencies.

Russ Forte, public affairs specialist in the Special Programs Division of USDA's Office of Information, is coordinating information team leader.

Forte sees the service containing such information as residue monitoring plans, a directory of field officials, brucellosis information, state cattle entry requirements, directories of state and federal animal health officials, federal export requirements for cattle, and press releases announcing research findings.

FDA proposes to contribute information on such consumer topics as canine parasites, sulfa residues in swine, and drug use guides for farm animals.

USDA agencies taking part in the effort are the Agricultural Research Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Cooperative State Research Service, and Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Forte will field questions and suggestions on Dialcom mailbox AGR009, or telephone number (202) 447-5505.

INFORMATION CENTER TRANSFERRED

USDA's Information Center, which fields hundreds of personal and telephoned inquiries about the Department weekly in its office just inside the central Independence Avenue entrance of the Administration Building, has been transferred to the Publishing Division of the Office of Information.

It will fall within the responsibilities of John S. Margelos, manager of the distribution branch.

Recently part of the Special Programs Division of Office of Information, the center is an agent for the Government Printing Office, selling agriculture-related popular publications.

YEARBOOK EDITOR RETIRING

Jack Hayes, editor of the Yearbook of Agriculture for 20 years, has announced he will retire from USDA's Office of Information May 31.

Hayes came to the old Press Service of USDA in 1956 after an editing career at The Washington Star, the Washington Times-Herald and other newspapers. He is a graduate of Fordham University.

FS INFORMATION OFFICERS STUDY CHANGE

Managing change and doing more with less were the underlying themes of the biennial USDA Forest Service information directors' meeting in Rosslyn, Va., May 7-9.

It was the first directors' national session in the Washington, D.C., area in more than a decade. It drew directors or their representatives from 18 regional offices and research stations, as well as the agency's only separate state and private forestry cooperation office.

Most of the same units also were represented by audiovisual specialists taking part in a separate day-long review of present and future audiovisual information in USDA.

Featured speakers from the Department were John M. McClung, director of USDA's Office of Information, and Ed Kendrick, leader of USDA's task force on audiovisuals.

McClung discussed efforts by OI to streamline that office's operations and to strengthen working arrangements with the agencies, while at the same time relaxing frivolous controls.

Emphasis, he said, would be on quality of product.

This theme was reinforced by Kendrick's review of the audiovisual task force progress. He said the task force's recommendations are tilting toward allowing maximum freedom of action, while exerting more control on quality and continuity of product.

Associate Forest Service Chief F. Dale Robertson said the information offices of the agency must play a key role in helping leadership cope with the rapid changes now taking place.

"We must respond to, but also shape, change," he said. "We must know how our actions will play out in the public."

Public affairs specialists, he said, must provide that perspective directly to the decision-maker.

"Give it to us straight," he said, "no matter how painful."

For the most effective service to the decision-maker, he said, the information officer should report directly to the line officer in charge of a unit.

Major subjects at the working sessions were:

The report of a professionalism task force designed to raise the skills and abilities of public information and other personnel; development of a proposed coordination structure for identifying and assuring advance action planning to manage emerging issues; prioritizing efforts to handle current national issues; improving personnel management skills; sharing services, facilities and personnel among information units as a means of decreasing costs; and application of new technology in getting, storing and disseminating information rapidly and effectively.

COMMUNICATIONS PROS NEEDED IN OHIO

Dr. Larry Whiting, head, information and applied communications, Ohio State University, is accepting applications for an Extension agricultural writer, an agricultural research writer, an assistant publications editor and two video camera/techicians.

Deadline is May 24. Grade transcripts, three references, samples of work, and a resume are needed. Send applications to him at 216 Kottman Hall, 20221 Coffey Road, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

PROGRAM SET FOR FOOD, HEALTH CONFABS

A preliminary program for the June 27-28 conference for food and health writers and editors in Dallas has been prepared by the Office of the Consumer Advisor, USDA.

The first morning of the conference, sponsored jointly by USDA and the Food and Drug Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services, will cover food safety--the state of the art. Experts will cover such subjects as risk management, meat and poultry inspection, and up-to-date information on such headline issues as sulfites, food irradiation, and salmonella.

That afternoon will cover the Dietary Guidelines and labeling.

The second morning gets into research on human nutrition, foodborne disease, and safeguarding the U.S. food supply at international airports.

At noon and the afternoon of the second day, experts will talk about the use of antibiotics in animal feed, the status of food assistance, and tips on how the media can avoid the bureaucratic shuffle in Washington, D.C.

The Dallas conference is the first in a series planned also for print and broadcast media in San Francisco, July 25-26; Chicago, August 22-23; Atlanta, September 19-20; and New York, October 31-November 1.

Programs in all the cities are expected to follow roughly the same format and cover the same subjects.

TEACHING, RESEARCH POST OPENS

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign seeks to fill the post of assistant professor of agricultural communications, who would teach and help develop an aggressive research program.

The deadline is June 14. Contact: James F. Evans, Agricultural Communications, 58 Mumford Hall, University of Illinois, 1301 W. Gregory Drive, Urbana, IL 61801. His phone number is (217) 333-4788, his Dialcom address: AGS750.

GWU SCHEDULES CAREER NIGHT

An evening to ask questions about career possibilities in public relations and to find out where public relations training can lead has been scheduled by The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., for Monday, May 20.

Several professionals in the field will be speakers at the 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. session on campus. For more information, call the program office at (202) 676-8065.

INSIDE INFORMATION is published for distribution to public affairs and information staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, its agencies, state departments of agriculture and land grant universities. Any items, comments and inquiries should be addressed to either John Crowley or Nancy Bevis, Office of Information, Room 536A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250 or to AGR009 mailbox on the Dialcom system, or call (202) 447-7454.

